

Having described the invention, the following is claimed:

1. A container for holding items to be microbially deactivated in a reprocessor, comprised of:

a generally cup-shaped tray having a bottom wall and a continuous side wall extending to one side from the periphery of said bottom wall, said bottom wall and said side wall defining a cavity for receiving instruments and items to be microbially deactivated;

a lid attachable to said tray, said lid dimensioned to cover said cavity; and

valve means having an open position to allow fluid flow through said container during a deactivation cycle, and a closed position sealing said cavity.

2. A container as defined in claim 1, wherein said valve means is disposed in said tray.

3. A container as defined in claim 2, wherein said valve means has a normally closed position.

4. A container as defined in claim 3, wherein said valve means is movable by an actuator element on said reprocessor, wherein said valve means is in said open position when said container is disposed within said reprocessor.

5. A container as defined in claim 1, wherein said valve means includes a resilient flexible valve element.

6. A container as defined in claim 1, wherein said valve means is comprised of three (3) flexible valve elements, each of which is independently movable between an open position and a closed position to open and close an associated opening in said tray.

7. A container for holding items to be microbially deactivated in a reprocessor, having:

a tray for holding said items to be deactivated;

a lid operable to cover said tray and to define an interior, sealed cavity that holds said items to be deactivated;

a passage into said cavity; and

at least one valve assembly on said tray associated with said passage into said cavity, said valve assembly including a valve element that is movable between an open position and a closed position, said valve element being in said open

position when said container is disposed within said reprocessor and being in said closed position when said container is removed from said reprocessor.

8. A container as defined in claim 7, wherein said valve assembly is movable by an actuator element on said reprocessor.

9. A container as defined in claim 7, wherein said valve assembly includes a flexible valve element having a normally closed position.

10. A container as defined in claim 9, wherein said normally closed valve element is movable to said open position by an external actuator on said reprocessor when said container is set in said reprocessor.

11. A container as defined in claim 10, wherein said container includes at least two passages into said container and a valve assembly associated with each passage, one of said passages being a fluid inlet and the other being a fluid outlet.

12. A system for microbially deactivating items, comprising:

a circulation system for circulating a microbial decontamination fluid through a deactivation chamber that forms a part of said circulation system;

a container for holding items to be deactivated having a sealable cavity in which said items to be deactivated may be placed, said container having at least one valve element that is movable between an open and a closed position to regulate fluid flow into said cavity; and

an actuator in said deactivation chamber operable to move said valve element to an open position when said container is disposed within said deactivation chamber, wherein the cavity within said container is in fluid communication with said circulation system when said valve element is in said open position.

13. A system as defined in claim 12, wherein

said circulation system includes a first fluid inlet line and a fluid outlet line that communicates with said deactivation chamber; and

said container includes a first fluid inlet port and a fluid outlet port that communicates respectively with said first fluid inlet line and said fluid outlet line of said circulation system when said container is disposed within said deactivation chamber.

14. A system as defined in claim 13, wherein a valve element is disposed within said first fluid inlet port and within said fluid outlet port.

15. A system as defined in claim 14, wherein an actuator is disposed in said deactivation chamber at said first fluid inlet line and at said fluid outlet line to operatively engage said valve elements in said first fluid inlet port and said fluid outlet port, when said container is disposed within said deactivation chamber.

16. A system as defined in claim 15, wherein each actuator physically contacts a valve element and moves said valve element to said open position when said container is placed in said deactivation chamber.

17. A system as defined in claim 15, wherein said actuators are movable relative to said deactivation chamber.

18. A system as defined in claim 17, wherein said deactivation chamber is defined by a housing panel and said actuators are mounted to said panel to allow limited motion of said actuators relative to said panel.

19. A system as defined in claim 12, wherein said microbial decontamination fluid is a liquid solution.

20. A system as defined in claim 12, wherein said circulation system is essentially closed loop and said microbial decontamination fluid is circulated through said closed loop.